

Storytelling

By Joseph Stockdale

Telling stories is a good way to combine instruction and entertainment. One story I tell, is Hatim's Hill, an adaptation of the story by that name from Sir Richard Burton's translation of *A Thousand and One Nights*. I have told it to different classes of 18- to 24-year-olds in Saudi Arabia.

Preliminary

First I get the students to tell me a story related in subject, theme or setting to the one that I am going to tell them. *Hatim's Hill* (see Footnote 1 below) is the story of a generous Bedouin and is set in the desert. It also happens to be a sequel to the original Hatim story (see script, footnote 1), which is very well known in Saudi Arabia. In this case, I ask if my students know the story of Hatim (they do) and have them tell it to me.

As they tell me the story, I interrupt to ask questions and make comments. This gets us all communicating, and gives me a feel for the vocabulary they know. It is also the technique I expect them to follow when I tell them my story.

When they have finished telling me the story, I ask them if they know the story of Hatim's hill. They don't, and want to hear it. At this point I start drawing on the board. For this story, I draw a hill, a tent and a camel. As I tell the story, I add to the drawing.

Telling the Story

I do not read from the script, nor have I memorized it word for word. I keep to the plot, but use different words every time. Much depends on how the students react, and what questions they ask. As a result, the presentation takes on the spirit of an improvisational performance. A teacher without the time, interest or inclination to absorb the story well enough to tell it *could* simply read it from the script and ask the questions which are supplied.

The key to keeping the students interested and involved during the oral presentation of the story is for the storyteller to ask questions as s/he goes along. In the script, a

selection of the questions I ask are on the left-hand side of the page, and across from them, on the right-hand side, are actual responses that my students have given.

A scrutiny of the questions that I ask as I tell the story shows that they are different from the conventional comprehension questions found at the bottom of a reading passage. Those questions usually require a student to regurgitate a piece of information from the text, most often to review a vocabulary item or practice a grammatical pattern.

The questions I most often ask when telling a story are of three sorts: Prediction questions, Opinion/Belief questions and Knowledge/Experience questions.

Prediction allows students to guess about the ongoing plot of the story. Opinion/Belief questions ask students to express their attitudes about actions, characters and events related to the story. And Knowledge/Experience questions give students a chance to broaden everyone's comprehension of some aspect of the story.

With these sorts of storytelling questions, there are no right or wrong answers. As a result, students are more apt to participate. Unlikely students turn out to have uncanny predictive abilities, to be experts in one field or another, or to have had unusual and interesting experiences. This is one of the few times in my class when students are actually interested in what a classmate is saying.

In response to students' predictions, I rarely say "right." Sometimes I say, "Good guess, guess again" but more often I say, "Maybe." This keeps the students guessing until all have participated. Then I say, "Listen and find out" and continue telling the story. The students can be quite vociferous when they are making their guesses, but at this moment the room is quiet. It is one of the rare moments when the students listen, not because I tell them to, but because they are genuinely interested. They want to find out if they have guessed right.

When I have finished telling the story and asking the post-questions, I quickly review what I have written and drawn on the board before handing out the script and reinforcement exercises. I don't erase the picture from the board. My classroom artists will turn it into a work of art with colored chalk during the break.

The Script

The students are curious to see the story in written form. As I watch them take their copy and look at it, it is clear to me that they are comparing what they remember from the oral version to the one fixed in type, finding the spots where they gave answers to

questions, comparing their answers to ones previously given, and hopefully noticing all of the written conventions such as the title, numbered pages, paragraphs, spaces and punctuation marks. This is one of the very few times I see the majority of my students reading silently, avidly, with interest and without my prompting.

Reinforcement Exercises

When the students are through examining the script, we do the reinforcement exercises. The types I have selected are ones that I feel are useful, can be done fairly quickly, and most importantly, will not diminish enthusiasm for the story.

Or the next one!

Hatim's Hill

Pre-Questions:

1. Do you like stories?
2. Do you like to tell stories?
3. Do you like to listen to stories?
4. Do you know the name of a storyteller?
5. Do you know the story of Hatim?
6. Do you know the story of Hatim's Hill?

The Story With Question Inserts

A king (Malik) was traveling through the desert with his Wazir, his servants and some Bedouins.

What were the Bedouins for?

One evening they stopped and camped at the foot of a hill. The King heard something at the top of the hill.

What do you think the King did?

The King walked up the hill to investigate.

What do you think he found?

The King didn't find anything, or see anything. Not a gazelle or a wolf or a hyena or a lizard or even a scorpion or a centipede.

"Men who camp at the bottom of this hill often hear things," an old Bedouin told the King.

"Why is that?" the King asked.

And the old Bedouin answered, "Because the famous Arab—Hatim—lies under the ground at the top of this hill. When it is dark, he walks around and makes noise."

"Don't be stupid," the King said. "Hatim is dead. A dead man can't walk around. A dead man can't make noise."

Can a dead man walk around and make noise?

"Your tongue is your horse," the old Bedouin said. "Protect it, and it will protect you!"

The King just laughed. A while later, the King again heard something at the top of the hill.

What do you think he did?

This time, he ordered his men to surround the hill before he walked to the top.

What do you think he found this time?

Again the King found nothing, and saw nothing. "Nobody ever sees Hatim," the old Bedouin said. "Sometimes, though, people see the light of his campfire at night."

"Hatim, Hatim, Hatim!" the King said angrily. "You say that he walks around the top of this hill, but where is he? I will speak to him. 'O (Ya) Hatim! O Hatim! Tonight I am your guest. Kill a horse for me! Show me your famous hospitality!'" The King looked around him and laughed. "You see," he told the old Bedouin. "There is no food. There is no Hatim." "Your head may be the price of your tongue," the old Bedouin warned. The King returned to his tent and went to sleep. During the night, he had a dream. In his dream, Hatim rose up out of the ground at the top of the hill. He walked down his hill, into the King's camp. He had a great sword which he raised up and drove into . . .

What do you think he drove his sword into?

. . . into the chest of the King's riding camel, at the bottom of the camel's neck.

Why do you think he did that?

The King woke up to the sound of camels roaring and the shouting of men. Grabbing his sword, he rushed outside. He found his men gathered around his riding camel,

which was lying on its side in the sand, rolling back and forth and roaring. The King, remembering his dream, checked his camel's neck.

What do you think he saw there?

There was not a mark on it.

"It is dying," the Bedouins shouted. We must slaughter it before it dies, then we can eat its meat."

Why must they slaughter it before it dies?

The King thrust his sword into his camel's chest, at the base of its neck. Then the Bedouins butchered it while the King's men dug a great hole in the sand. They cooked the camel in the hole and, after several hours, it was ready. That morning they ate and ate until their stomachs were tight as drums and they could eat no more. The Bedouins had not forgotten to post guards during the feast. Now the guards came rushing back to camp, waving their swords and shouting excitedly.

Why were the guards so excited?

"A stranger is approaching," they shouted.

Who do you think the stranger is?

The men all gathered together and waited, ready for friend or enemy. They watched a handsome young man approach. He was riding a huge black male camel, and behind him was a beautiful white camel, a female, which was riderless. When the stranger was near, he dismounted and threw handfuls of sand into the air.

Why did he do that?

"He comes in peace," the Bedouins shouted. "He does not want to make trouble . . . with us." They shouted and waved for him to come forward.

The handsome young man greeted the King and said, "I have brought you a camel to ride. It is the best camel my people have, and it is a replacement for the one you slaughtered last night."

How do you think the King felt?

The King was amazed. "Who are you? And how do you know that I need a camel?"

"I am Adi, son of Hatim," the young man said. "Last night, while I was sleeping, I had a dream. In my dream, my father Hatim visited me. 'Adi,' he said, 'a great and famous King is camping at the foot of my hill. He said that he was hungry, but I had nothing to offer my guest, so I slaughtered his camel, so he and his men could eat. Now he needs another camel. Please select an excellent riding camel, the best our people have to offer, and bring it to him.'" The King listened to Adi's story, and was even more astonished. "By God," he said, "when your father was alive, he was the most generous of the Arabs. He is dead now, but he is still the most generous!"

When the King finally reached his palace, he ordered his scribes to write down this story and tell it to all of the people.

We can all learn from this story of a generous man.

Post-Questions:

1. Did you like this story?
2. Which is better, having money or having a good name (reputation)?
3. Which is better, money or friends. Why?
4. Who is the most generous man in your class?
5. Do you know the story of a generous man?

II. Directions: Write what the numbered words refer to in the spaces provided at the end of the reading passage.

A King and **his** (1) men camped at the foot of a hill. The King thought that he heard something, so he went to the top of the hill. But he didn't see anything **there** (2). An old Bedouin told **him** (3) that it was the ghost of Hatim. The King didn't believe **him** (4). That night, the King had a dream. In his dream, Hatim came down the hill and killed his camel. **He** (5) woke up and went outside. His camel was rolling on the ground, so the Bedouins slaughtered **it** (6). They all ate a great feast. The next day, Adi arrived with an extra camel for the King. **He** (7) said that his father had visited him in a dream and told **him** (8) to bring **it** (9) to **him** (10).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

4. _____ 9. _____

5. _____ 10. _____

III. Directions: Based only on the context try to guess the meaning of the underlined word. Write maybe, no or yes in the blanks.

1a. The King slaughtered his camel.

- a. He bought a camel. _____
- b. He cut up a camel. _____
- c. He killed a camel. _____

1b. The King slaughtered his camel with a long knife.

- a. He bought a camel. _____
- b. He cut up a camel. _____
- c. He killed a camel. _____

1c. The King slaughtered his camel with a long knife and let its blood run out before cutting it up.

- a. He bought a camel. _____
- b. He cut up a camel. _____
- c. He killed a camel. _____

2a. Adi dismounted.

- a. He got on an animal. _____
- b. He got off an animal. _____
- c. He got into a boat. _____

2b. Adi dismounted from his camel.

- a. He got on an animal. _____
- b. He got off an animal. _____
- c. He got into a boat. _____

2c. Adi dismounted from his camel and approached the King on foot.

- a. He got on an animal. _____

- b. He got off an animal. _____
- c. He got into a boat. _____

3a. Hatim was famous for his hospitality.

- a. He was famous for his ability to tell stories. _____
- b. He was famous for taking care of his guests. _____
- c. He was famous for being rude and impolite. _____

3b. Hatim was famous for his hospitality; everybody enjoyed visiting him.

- a. He was famous for his ability to tell stories. _____
- b. He was famous for taking care of his guests. _____
- c. He was famous for being rude and impolite. _____

3c. Hatim was famous for his hospitality; everybody liked to visit him because he always made sure that visitors were happy, comfortable and had everything that they needed.

- a. He was famous for his ability to tell stories. _____
- b. He was famous for taking care of his guests. _____
- c. He was famous for being rude and impolite. _____

IV. Directions: Mark the correct letter.

1. The men ____ camp at the bottom of the hill.

- a. made
- b. did
- c. had
- d. got

2. The King and his men camped at the ____ of the hill.

- a. leg
- b. foot
- c. ankle
- d. knee

3. The King saw Hatim _____ a dream.

- a. on
- b. at
- c. in
- d. with

4. The King was _____ surprised that he asked two questions at once.

- a. too
- b. to
- c. very
- d. so

5. Adi gave _____ an excellent white female riding camel.

- a. to the King
- b. the King
- c. for the King
- d. at the King

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Footnote 1

Hatim was a famous Bedouin sheik who owned a beautiful black stallion. The king sent his Wazir to buy it. For three days Hatim fed his guest meat. Then the Wazir asked to buy Hatim's horse. Hatim told his story. The times were hard. He had given his last sheep to his people. When the Wazir had come, he had only his stallion left. So he had slaughtered it to feed his guest. and statements.